

NIH Labor-Management Partnership Council Meeting Minutes

Thursday, April 17, 2003

Attendees: Arturo Giron, Charles Palmer, Walter Jones, Steve Rivero, Tony Clifford, Leonard Taylor, Mike Showers, Tom Fitzpatrick, Richard Laubach, Rita Sweeney, Kevin Murphy, Mark Morine, Linda Tarlow and Barry Kevin,

Facilitator: Fern Kaufman

Old Business: Minutes of the March 20, 2003 meeting were reviewed, amended and approved.

New Business:

The E-HR Initiative - CareerHere, Employee Express & ITAS: Mr. Kevin P. Murphy, Director, Division of HR Information Systems, OHR. Mr. Murphy made a presentation on the initiative taking place from his office to consolidate all of the computer-based HR support systems onto one Intranet-based web page for the use of all NIH employees. It is called e-HR. The goal of the initiative is to improve the quality of service delivery, provide 24-hour access and realize cost savings over the long term. The system will be initially focused on providing access to three current systems: CareerHere – the job advertising and application processing system used by NIH; Integrated Time and Attendance System (ITAS); and Employee Express. CareerHere will be significantly improved through an upgrade utilizing the QuickHire system, a commercial support provider that is being coordinated government-wide by the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). ITAS and Employee Express will essentially remain the same as they are now with expanded customer usage. Mr. Laubach raised a question about usage of ITAS by managers and employees. He noted that management has not fully implemented it in many work areas, for example many areas still requiring employees to submit leave requests via paper. Mr. Murphy acknowledged that usage is not 100%, but OHR reps will be meeting with IC Executive Officers in the near future to encourage wider implementation of ITAS and Employee Express to realize the cost savings these system should be producing. He noted that Employee Express has surveyed their customers and the approval rates are consistently very high. Mr. Laubach mentioned that managers have made comments in the past that the union is against this wider usage, and he stated that this is not the case.

The e-HR initiative is being designed within the NIH Portal to take advantage of “single sign-on” capabilities. Employees will be expected to print their own payslips. This will require universal access to a computer and printer; many attendees did not think that was realistic, with numerous communities at NIH not having access to a computer and some workers not being computer literate or having limitations that would prevent them from using the system. Mr. Giron described the communities as 70% who have computer-based jobs, 20% who don’t have computer-based jobs but are computer literate and could use one if permitted access, and the 10% who are not computer literate or have physical or mental limitations that require OHR assistance. In addition, the “single sign-on” may present a security problem if someone does not sign-out properly.

CareerHere through QuickHire is expected to greatly enhance service. The system will rank and rate applications based on a question and answer selection process, not utilizing KSAs as is most commonly used by agencies across the federal government. Nor will it use a Resumix type system that recognizes buzzwords. The new CareerHere system will also allow an applicant to check the status of the position online until the position is filled. CareerHere is scheduled to be fully implemented HHS-wide by October 2003. Significant benefit to NIH is expected since the system will be much quicker than the current process, will likely have less errors due to less human interaction and will be available 24 hours a day. It was asked whether an acknowledgement message or confirmation number would be provided to the applicant so they have some means to verify receipt by the agency. The answer was yes for CareerHere and Employee Express (when it is used over the web). A definitive answer for those using Employee Express over the phone was not available on this point; Mr. Murphy will follow-up on this information.

Mr. Laubach feels that there is quite a bit of workload shifting associated with this initiative. Much of the work normally performed by HR is being shifted to other work centers, which a supervisor is expected to absorb. He said he did not think managers or supervisors would accept this so easily. Mr. Murphy acknowledged that there is pain all around as the Department mandates restructuring and FTE reductions. NIH HR is in the process of downsizing from 430 FTEs to 250 FTEs. Workload is increasing in all areas. Mr. Walter Jones recommended that OHR consult and work with the IC Executive Officers to identify solutions to this very real problem.

A-76 Update: Mr. Tom Fitzpatrick provided an update on the long-awaited decision on the A-76 Circular from OMB. That decision is expected in late April or early May. There is an A-76 conference, conducted by the Federal Acquisition Community, scheduled at the headquarters of the Department of Interior in DC on May 8th. There is a high probability that the decision will be announced at that conference. One likely, significant change is the elimination of the Independent Review Official (IRO) and the enforcement of time frames for certain milestones. The NIH inventory for FY04 is due to HHS on May 12th, this is the driver for future studies. Both of the current studies, Property Management and Extramural Support (previously known as Grants Management), are proceeding on schedule. On April 15th the final Performance Work Statement (PWS) drafts were completed and the announcements are planned to go out on Monday, April 21st. The comment stage is complete for the PWS phase; however, questions and comments will still be considered and if necessary the Request for Proposal (RFP) will be amended. There are separate email addresses for the two functions under study and those email addresses can be found on the A-76 web page. The route for the comments starts at the Contracting Officer then will be forwarded to the PWS workgroup for review and forward to the Most Efficient Organization (MEO) workgroup as appropriate. If a change is made it will be forwarded to FEDBIZOPS for an amendment to the RFP.

Mr. Taylor stated that the MEO Teams feel they are not getting enough support from Warden Associates. The MEO teams feel that they have been wasting a great deal of time, possibly as much as a month. Mr. Laubach, who is on an MEO team, stated that he believes they are in fact getting the support that they request from Warden. Mr. Fitzpatrick said he appreciates that information, and he will monitor the situation. Mr. Fitzpatrick said the Leaders for the two PWS workgroups would switch functions for their roles as Leaders for the MEO workgroups. This is to maintain integrity of the firewall system.

Mr. Giron asked when the schedule for the next round of studies would be issued. Mr. Fitzpatrick said the A-76 Steering Committee is planning to issue the FY04 schedule by mid-May, and noted it will be provided in a time-appropriate manner. Question: Why are the Firefighters in the Department of Defense (DoD) exempt from A-76 and the NIH Firefighters are not. Mr. Fitzpatrick answered that DoD has specific funding requirements in their budget that protects certain programs, such as Indian-owned corporations. Mr. Laubach inquired why NIH didn't use such a mechanism. Mr. Taylor said they had tried that, but that OMB mandated that they would be competed and HHS voiced an objection. The only other option would be for some outside party, such as a union, to raise the issue with a member of the congressional budget committee, which NIH management can not do.

The CART is badly in need of additional staff, but due to the hiring freeze they are unable to hire anyone. This has put a strain on the current staff.

Updating and Signing a New Partnership Agreement - Continued: The last remaining issue is the identification of the four management representatives to the council. The four are: Charlie Palmer, NIH Labor Relations Officer; Leonard Taylor, Acting Director, Office of Research Facilities; Walter Jones, Clinical Center Deputy Director of Operations and Diversity Management; and Arturo Giron, Acting Director, Department of Public Safety, ORS. A comment was made that these four people could change and the agreement should be worded to reflect that. Mr. Barry Kevin will incorporate that wording, and prepare the agreement document for signature by all parties.

Miscellaneous Issues:

Update from last meeting:

- Mr. Kevin did not receive any objection to the Council's name change proposal. As of this meeting the Council will now be called the NIH Labor-Management Cooperation Council. The agreement will include this language.
- Mr. Kevin did not receive any input on the proposal for the Labor-Management Cooperation Award. Mr. Laubach said he had been busy and asked if additional time could be provided for a full consideration. Everyone was in agreement.
- Union representation on the HHS LMCC: Maria Price-Detherage, the Coordinator of the HHS Council, passed the word that their charter calls for the three unions with national consultation rights with HHS. The three unions are AFGE, LIUNA and NTEU. There are other unions that represent HHS employees, but they do not sit on the HHS Council.
- Mr. Steve Rivero had requested that Mr. John Czajkowski come give a brief to the Council on the transition. During the period between the two meetings, Mr. Kevin provided Mr. Rivero access to a webcast recording of a briefing on the subject. Mr. Rivero indicated that he did view it and it satisfied his questions.

Hiring Freeze: Mr. Taylor stated that he was recently informed that ORS and ORF are frozen at the current on-board staff level. No hiring. People can be promoted, but there can be no addition.

Power Plant Celebration: AFGE would like to be allowed to hold/conduct a ceremony to

recognize the 50-year anniversary of AFGE representing the employees of the NIH power plant. Mr. Laubach said he believes this is a positive effort and that it would boost morale. There has been an issue with getting permission to use the NIH logo and seal on commemorative items such as coffee mugs, lapel pins, t-shirts, etc. The effort has stalled and AFGE would like permission to conduct the festivities independently. Mr. Taylor and Mr. Clifford are both aware of this initiative and are happy to talk about this. The hang-up has been getting permission on the use of the logo. The person who can provide an answer to this question is Genia Bohrer, the ORS Ethics Officer. Linda Tarlow will contact her and find out this information. Mr. Taylor and Mr. Clifford will work on this issue with AFGE leadership.